

Legal Research 101

Legal research can be daunting for patrons who are just starting out. Here are some good starting points to help ease the transition into the legal research environment.

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No member of the law library staff can interpret legal materials. Materials referenced by the law librarians are intended as sources of information and are not warranted to supply definitive answers. If you have legal questions, we recommend you consult an attorney. If you need an attorney, please consult with the [Wyoming State Bar Association](#) or [Legal Aid of Wyoming](#).

Identifying your needs

The first step to any research project is to identify your needs. Here are a few important questions to ask:

What is my legal issue?

Identify the main subject of the legal issue.

Is this a federal or state case?

Which court has jurisdiction over the issue? This will help identify which type of sources to use.

Is this a civil or criminal case?

Which category does the legal issue fall into? This will help narrow down the type of sources needed.

Types of Sources

There are several types of legal resources. Here are just a few of the larger categories.

Codes

Codes or statutes are the actual laws that have been established by a government. The [US Code](#) is separated into titles (e.g. Title 11-Bankruptcy). States also have their own set of statutes or code. [The Wyoming State Law Library](#) has all 50 states' statutes from statehood to the present,

as well as many territorial statutes.

Court Cases

Court cases can be found in print via the National Reporter system. Reporters series are broken up by court (see [Citations](#) below). Online court cases can be found via [Google Scholar](#) in their "Legal Documents" section. For more information on using Google Scholar for legal materials, see our Google Scholar research guide.

Databases

The Wyoming State Law Library has access to several databases at their public access terminals including: Westlaw, Heinonline, Shepard's, and Gale Legal Forms. The Wyoming State Library has access to several [law databases](#) for Wyoming citizens. Free databases such as [Google Scholar](#), [Cornell's LII](#), [Justia.com](#), [FindLaw.com](#), and [FDSys](#) are also available online.

Law Journals

Law journals and law reviews are academic journals that publish articles on law-related topics. Some of these law journals may have issues on their websites or published online. [The Wyoming State Law Library](#) has an extensive print collection of law journals as well as a subscription to Heinonline, the legal world's premiere law journal database.

Regulations

Regulations are the rules set forth by government agencies such as the USDA or the FDA. Federal Regulations can be found in the [Code of Federal Regulations](#), which is broken up by titles. [Wyoming Rules and Regulations](#) can be searched on the Wyoming Secretary of State's website.

Self-Help books

There are several types of self-help legal books, the most popular of which are published by Nolo Press. These books usually cover the most popular legal topics such as Divorce, Custody, or Bankruptcy and provide a basic legal framework for the subject. To find Nolo books, simply search for "Nolo" in your local library or Worldcat.org catalog.

Treatises

Treatises are books that analyze specific legal topics. They offer a more in-depth look at a legal subject. Popular treatises within the legal community are often referred to by the author's last name such as "Couch on Insurance" or "Wharton's Criminal Procedure". These may not technically be the actual titles or authors of the newest editions so be sure to double check when citing or searching.

Learning the Language

[Black's Dictionary](#)

Black's Dictionary is a dictionary of legal terms. It can be found in most public libraries as well as online.

[Nolo's Free Dictionary of Law Terms and Legal Definitions](#)

Nolo is a popular publisher of legal self-help books that has created an online dictionary of legal terms. Nolo also has a free encyclopedic [database](#) of legal articles and self-help topics.

[United States Courts Glossary](#)

An online dictionary of commonly used legal words and phrases established by the United States Judicial Branch.

[Wex](#)

Wex is a community created, free online dictionary and encyclopedia edited by legal experts. It is sponsored by the Legal Information Institute at Cornell University.

American Jurisprudence (AmJur)

American Jurisprudence is a multivolume legal encyclopedia. It is organized by broad subjects, e.g. Bankruptcy or Divorce and then broken down into more narrow topics. It is a great starting point for legal research and lists relevant cases that apply to each subject.

Corpus Juris Secundum (CJS)

CJS is a multivolume legal encyclopedia. It is organized by broad subjects, e.g. Bankruptcy or Divorce. It is a great starting point for legal research and lists relevant cases that apply to each subject.

Words and Phrases

Words and Phrases is a multivolume encyclopedia of legal words and phrases. It is organized by word. It cites various cases and attributed legal meanings to the word or phrase. For example, the term "lease" may have been used differently in several different cases. This is a great way to find out which courts have defined the term and how the term was defined.

Citations

[Basic Legal Citation](#)

Cornell's guide to basic legal citation. Examples and instructions are given based on type of source.

The Bluebook: A Uniform System of Citation

The Bluebook is the standard for citing legal materials within the United States. Copies should be available in most academic and law libraries.

Basic Citation Guide

Below are a list of basic citations for reporters, statutes and codes, and popular secondary sources. If you have any questions regarding citations, please contact [The Wyoming State Law Library](http://www.wyomingstatelibrary.org).

Reporters		
Reporter Abbreviation	Reporter Title	Courts Covered
A., A.2d	Atlantic Reporter (first and second series)	CT, DC, DE, MD, NJ, NH, ME, PA, RI, VT
F., F.2d, F.3d	Federal Reporter (First through third series)	US Court of Appeals
F. Supp., F. Supp 2d	Federal Supplement (First and second series)	US District Courts
L. Ed., L. Ed.2d	US Supreme Court Reports, Lawyer Edition (First and second series)	US Supreme Court
N.E., N.E.2d	North Eastern Reporter (first and second series)	IL, IN, MA, NY, OH
N.W., N.W.2d	North Western Reporter (First and second series)	IA, MN, MI, ND, NK, SD, WI
P., P.2d., P.3d.	Pacific Reporter (First, through third series)	AZ, AK, CA, CO, HI, ID, KS, MT, NM, NV, OK, OR, UT, WA, WY
S. Ct.	Supreme Court Reporter	US Supreme Court
S.E., S.E.2d	South Eastern Reporter (First and second series)	GA, NC, SC, VA, WV
So., So. 2d	Southern Reporter (First and second series)	AL, FL, LA, MS
S.W., S.W.2d, S.W.3d	South Western Reporter (First through third series)	AR, KY, MO, TN, TX
U.S.	United States Reports	US Supreme Court

Statutes and Codes	
Statute/Code abbreviation	Source
Pub. L or P. L.	Public Law
Stat.	Statutes at Large
U.S.C.	United States Code (Government version)
U.S.C.A	United States Code Annotated (West version)
U.S.C.S	United States Code Services (LexisNexis version)
C.F.R	Code of Federal Regulations
WY Stat. or W.S.	Wyoming Statute

Popular Secondary Sources	
Abbreviation	Title
A.L.R., A.L.R.2d, A.L.R.3d, A.L.R.4th, A.L.R.5th, A.L.R.6th	American Law Reports (First through sixth series)
A.L.R. Fed.	American Law Reports (Federal series)
Am. Jur., Am. Jur. 2d	American Jurisprudence, (First and second series)
C.J.S.	Corpus Juris Secundum
L. Rev.	Law Review
L.J.	Law Journal

Local Libraries

Here is a list of libraries where you can find assistance doing your research.

[Wyoming State Law Library](#)

The Wyoming State Law Library serves as the source of legal information for the Wyoming Judicial System, with particular emphasis on the Wyoming Supreme Court. It also serves as a research library for the legislative and administrative branches of Wyoming State Government.

[George W. Hopper Law Library](#)

The George William Hopper Law Library is located in the College of Law building at the University of Wyoming in Laramie. They are open to the public for researching, browsing, borrowing, or studying.

[Wyoming State Library](#)

The Wyoming State Library is the official library of the state of Wyoming. It is also a federal repository for government documents. It is the head library behind the WYLD catalog, which unites all Wyoming libraries into one cataloging system.

[Wyoming Libraries Directory](#)

A directory of all Wyoming libraries including public, academic, medical, institutional, and special libraries. The entries list contact information, hours, websites, staff, etc. Users are able to browse by type of library or search by library or librarian's name.

[Worldcat.org](#)

Worldcat.org is an international library catalog which allows users to search for resources from all around the world. Each item's catalog record lists the nearest locations for the material and gives links to local libraries. If a local library doesn't have a copy, it also allows patrons to interlibrary loan the material from another library or purchase the material via Amazon or Barnes & Noble.